



## CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: December 20, 2006  
To: Members of the Historical Commission  
From: Sarah L. Burks, Preservation Planner  
Re: D-1097: 24 Gray Gardens West/118 Huron Avenue

An application to demolish the roof at 24 Gray Gardens West was received on November 30 and related drawings on December 13. The applicant was notified of an initial determination of significance, and a public hearing was scheduled for January 4, 2007.

### Site & Current Condition

The structure is located on 24 Gray Gardens West, a small cul-de-sac off Garden Street containing 8 houses. The rear of the house faces Huron Avenue. It is a two-story wood-frame house with clapboard siding centered on its lot. The assessed value for the land and building (Map 227/Parcel 88) according to the FY2007 online property database was \$2,178,900. The structure is sited on a 11,371 square-foot lot in a Residence A-2 zone. The zone permits an FAR of 0.5 and has a 35' height limit.

The configuration of the lot is nearly square, and it is located in the western corner of the subdivision. There are seven houses on Gray Gardens West, all of which are either 2 or 2½ stories tall.

The current proposal is to replace the existing gable roof on the main block of the house with a gambrel roof. The ridge height would increase by approximately 3'-2". The applicant has submitted plan and elevation drawings for the proposed project, with the existing roofline indicated on the elevations.

The current condition of the house appears to be excellent. The cladding, trim, and roof have been very well maintained. The owner has experienced cracking and peeling of paint in the living room and the source of the problem has not been identified.

### Architectural Description

Designed in 1928 by the architectural firm of Duguid & Martin, the house at 24 Gray Gardens West is a two-story, gabled-roof, house with clapboards on the walls and wood shingles on the gable ends. The house was executed in the Georgian Revival style.

From their home office on Dunstable Road, William and Mary Duguid produced more small, high-quality period houses in Cambridge from the late 1920s through 1940 than any other architectural firm. Scottish engineer William Duguid and his

wife Mary had built housing for war victims in France during World War I before moving to Cambridge in 1920 and setting up a joint practice in 1925, specializing in Colonial houses. Mary Duguid had studied history at Wellesley College and interior design at the Cambridge School of Architecture. With her sense of history and design, his technical knowledge, and their combined social conscience, the firm was well suited to meet the needs of the small-house market of the 1930s. Their partner, George Martin, died in 1928, but the name of the firm remained unchanged.

Cambridge commissions for the firm included several houses on Grey Gardens East and West, Fayerweather Street, and Old Dee Road. Duguid & Martin's design for 7 Old Dee Road (1937) is one of the few 20<sup>th</sup> century houses in Cambridge that reflect the simpler houses of the Early Georgian period, a period that seemed to appeal less to revivalists than the High Georgian. Duguid used Colonial precedents only as historical reference points for designs that were otherwise quite modern.

At first glance, 24 Gray Gardens West is a simple "Colonial" design imitating the organic quality of 18<sup>th</sup> century New England architecture that experienced a resurgence in popularity in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. But upon further examination, the house is a little more complicated. First, there's the unusual choice to orient the main block of the house and projecting ell facing Gray Gardens West, which one would logically consider the front approach. The layout does fit neatly on the site, considering the lot's location in the corner position of the cul-de-sac. It also presents a very charming and informal approach to the house, which is reinforced by a non-linear landscaped path to the recessed front door. Like at 7 Old Dee Road, Duguid & Martin chose to emulate the Early Georgian period rather than the High Georgian in designing this house.



24 Gray Gardens West, December 2006. Photo by Paul Trudeau.

On the rear elevation on the Huron Street side of the house, the composition is actually more symmetrical and formal, with a typical 5 (+1) bay organization and pedimented center entrance. One would not expect such a careful architectural composition on the side walled off from Huron Avenue, which was a social dividing line between the upper middle class Gray Gardens subdivision and the adjacent neighborhood of workers cottages and three-deckers built on former claypits. The formality and symmetry of this façade is interrupted, however, by an integrated two-bay concrete block garage, which is an original design feature and not a later alteration.



Rear of 24 Gray Gardens West, December 2006. Photo by Paul Trudeau.

The windows are a mixture of divided light double-hung-sash. On the front, there are a combination of 8-over-8 and 12-over-12 sash, and on the rear, the sash are a more consistent 6-over-6. A three-part window on the front wall of the dining room is made up of two casements flanking a fixed center panel. Bay windows with concave copper roofs are located one on the east end of the main block of the house and another on the end wall of the ell.

The plan of the house is also a bit topsy turvy, with the formal living room situated in the ell and a dining room and small kitchen in the main block of the house. The stair is positioned at the center of the house, adjacent to the back wall of the garage. Though this is an early example of an incorporated garage, there is no internal door connecting to the inside of the house. The exterior of the garage is rather raw, with no attempt to disguise the concrete block walls. The Duguids excelled at designing Colonial-inspired houses that were efficient and incorporated the most modern conveniences of the day for the middle-class household. They were on trend with other architects of the early twentieth century by modifying the traditional house plan to reflect social changes of the period, such as the elimination of servant's quarters, reduction in the size of the stair hall, and incorporation of the automobile garage. The result is a very charming whole, except for the inexplicable, but apparently original, way in which the raw concrete block walls of the garage protrude from the Huron Avenue façade.

### History

(excerpted from *Building Old Cambridge* manuscript)

Gray Gardens is one of three subdivisions in Old Cambridge, along with Coolidge Hill (1915, 1924) and Larchwood (1915) that illustrate the planning principles popularized by the Garden City movement. The movement was prefigured in Cambridge at Charles Eliot Norton's estate, Shady Hill, in 1889, but the 20th-century subdivisions involved unprecedented controls over the appearance, setbacks, cost, and use of buildings.

Most of the land that became Gray Gardens had been accumulated by Jonas Wyeth III, who in 1859 built a large stucco house at 60 Raymond Street near the crest of the hill and lived there until his death in 1868. A year later Edwin Dresser, a Central Square manufacturer of diaries and memorandum books, purchased

Wyeth's entire property, which was bounded by Raymond and Garden streets, Huron Avenue, and the Botanic Garden; later he bought another field across Garden Street. Dresser resisted all temptations to develop his 8½-acre estate, which remained intact at his death in 1915.

In 1922 rumors that a speculator was preparing to fill the property with two-family houses prompted a group of twenty-one neighbors to form the Garden Street Trust. George Weatherbee, a civil engineer, prepared a design for Gray Gardens East in March 1922. The plan showed twenty-five lots along a gently curving street between Garden and Raymond streets and a short cul-de-sac that originally incorporated Dresser's mansion. In April the trust purchased the land from Dresser's heirs, who in May received permits for the demolition of the Wyeth-Dresser house and barn, perhaps as a condition of the sale. For the 2.6 acres that became Gray Gardens West, the Olmsted firm laid out ten irregularly shaped lots on a landscaped cul-de-sac that cut diagonally through the block.

Thirty-year deed restrictions controlled development on both streets. Construction was limited to single-family dwellings, and the trustees had to approve the placement and design of each proposed house. The guarantee of environmental harmony and the pleasant location next to the Botanic Garden proved desirable to would-be homeowners, including six members of the trust, and within eight years every lot was filled. A 1927 house at 60 Raymond Street (Putnam & Cox) stands on the site the original Wyeth-Dresser house, but portions of Dresser's stone wall still stand on Raymond Street.

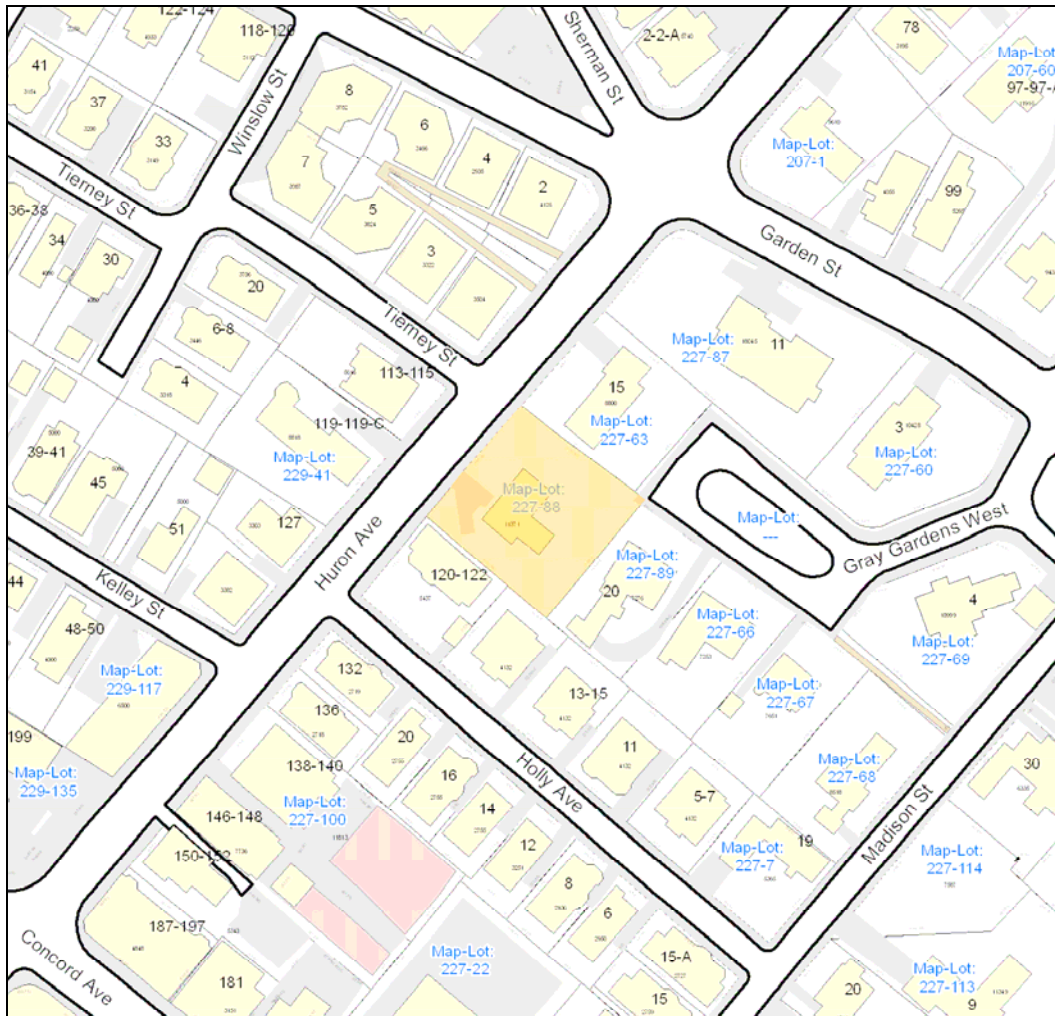
The houses on Gray Gardens East and West were custom designs that cost between \$9,000 and \$57,000; most were Georgian Revival and four architectural firms accounted for more than half: Putnam & Cox (8), Duguid & Martin (4), Howe & Manning (3), and Frost & Raymond (2). The houses range from the very large brick residence by Duguid & Martin at 2 Gray Gardens East (1930), Howe & Manning's Georgian Revival brick example skillfully fitted onto the triangular lot at 4 Gray Gardens West (1922), and Eliza Newkirk Roger's graceful Tudor house at 31 Madison Street (1924), to the modest frame houses at 9, 11, 26, and 27 Gray Gardens East that are typical of suburban houses of the 1920s. More unusual are a small Arts & Crafts style house at 16 Gray Gardens East that one of the original trustees, A. Graham Carey, designed for himself in 1922 and built with brick from the demolished Dresser mansion, and a 1798 house that was moved to 20 Gray Gardens West in 1930 from Hall's Corner in South Duxbury. Gray Gardens remains surprisingly intact, although the two houses that were constructed after the restrictions expired in 1952 prove the value of consistent design standards. Seventeen Gray Gardens East (1958) is a banal Ranch with Georgian detailing, while 22 (1962) is a remarkably insensitive three-story International Style box set directly on the street.

The architectural and building partnership of Duguid & Martin were the owners, architects, and builders for the house, pulling a permit in November of 1928. The construction cost approximately \$17,000. The first residents were Andrew and Philis Hanry. Andrew's occupation was somehow related to wool according to city directories. An MIT professor and his wife, Louis and Martha Shlichter, were residents by 1937. Another change in ownership occurred by 1954, when John Phillips Coolidge, a Harvard professor, and his wife Mary were listed in the directory. The Coolidges lived in the house for twenty years or more.

Very few alterations have occurred over the years. Modification of the doors and windows in the rear study (not visible from either Gray Gardens West or Huron Avenue) are the only exterior modifications on record.



The house at 24 Gray Gardens West meets the definition of significance in the ordinance because it is a contributing building in the Gray Gardens East & West National Register District. It is also significant for its Georgian Revival architecture and relationship to the important Duguid & Martin design firm.



Property Map for 24 Gray Gardens West, City of Cambridge, Massachusetts

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cc: Ranjit Singanayagam, Inspectional Services  
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